

John A. McCauley

Died in the line of duty on October 25, 1938

Description of Act

Hawthorne Inn began its career on Rocky Neck in 1886. By 1938 it had become a complex totaling 23 buildings including an elaborate cottage setup, stores, and a casino. One of the main buildings was Endicott Hall, a three-story building on the harbor front. It was there that a fire started on the night of February 10, in the fury of a 40 mile-an-hour northwest gale at near-zero temperatures. The all-out signal would not be sounded until over 12 hours later, and one firefighter, Deputy Chief John A. McCauley, would subsequently die from the effects of a tragic accident occurring in the line of duty.

While firefighters fought the blaze at Endicott Hall, Miss Mary Wright, 19 years old, of 9 Wonson Street, spotted the first arson device in another main building, the Manse. Eighteen of these incendiary devices were eventually found and extinguished and/or disassembled by firefighters, police and citizens. These arson contraptions consisted of a new wooden mackerel firkin or keg filled with about 24 gallons of denatured alcohol, and a two-foot long wax paper fuse leading to a lighted 16-inch long candle.

As firefighters battled the blazes and concentrated on containing the fires in the Hawthorne Inn area, burning embers started another fire at the Blythdale, a three-story structure on Eastern Point. Fire Chief Homer R. Marchant ordered another alarm about 2 a.m., three hours after the start of the fire, and four engines from Rockport and Manchester, covering headquarters, were brought to the scene.

Chemical 1 also responded and was driven by Richard A. Perry to the Blythdale fire. Perry was bringing Chemical 1 to a stop in response to a signal from McCauley when the kit skidded on the ice, and the end of the ladder struck McCauley across the jaw and knocked him down. He was placed in the police patrol car and taken immediately to the Addison Gilbert Hospital. McCauley had a severe gash on his lip, two teeth were knocked out, and he was considerably shaken. He was confined to his Maplewood Avenue home for several weeks and then returned to duty, but he never fully recovered from the effects of this accident. He died on October 25, 1938, about 8 1/2 months later.

Background

John. A. McCauley was Deputy Chief of the Gloucester Fire Department for over 14 years and was a member of the department for over 35 years. He was 59 years old, born on September 4, 1879. He was survived by his wife, Sarah (Tibbetts) McCauley and three sons, Carleton, Malcolm, and Donald R. McCauley, all of Gloucester.

Postscripts

In November 1938, a board of physicians was appointed to determine if McCauley's death was the result of the injury he sustained in the February 10-11, 1938 fire at the Hawthorne Inn. This board was appointed because of the application filed for a pension by his widow, Mrs. Sarah McCauley. The board consisted of Drs. Scott W. Mooring and Ira B. Hull plus Dr. Harry C. Burrell who was designated by the State Department of

Public Health. The board concluded that "the death was a natural and proximate result of said injury or hazard."

Thomas W. White, owner of the Hawthorne Inn property, had been in Florida for several months prior to the fire. His secretary, Mrs. Lola Bella Farren, had been staying on the premises since two weeks before the fire. She said she took the 6:32 p.m. train to Boston on the night of the fire (which began around 11 p.m.) and first learned about the fire when she returned to Gloucester the next morning. The Essex County Grand Jury met during the week ending Saturday, May 14, 1938. They returned a "true bill" against Mrs. Farren of Springfield, Pennsylvania, indicting her on a complaint charging her with aiding in the burning of the two cottages at Hawthorne Inn, East Gloucester on Thursday night, February 10, 1938. when Endicott Hall and Blythdale Cottage were partially destroyed. (See Note) A complaint against Mr. White charging him with aiding and procuring the burning was closed before it could be presented to the Grand Jury because he passed away, allegedly by suicide, on April 7, 1938 in Philadelphia.

Note: According to the May 17, 1938 Gloucester Daily Times, Mrs. Farren pleaded not guilty in superior court to defrauding insurance companies. Attempts made to determine the disposition of this case were unsuccessful. These included a search of the Times from that date through 1943 and a visit to the Essex County Court, Clerk's Office which revealed that a judge's written approval was required before such information could be released. It is Fire Inspector Larry Colby's recollection that the case never came to trial.

References

Gloucester Daily Times, February 11, 1938, October 15, 1938, October 29, 1938 and March 3, 1938.